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Community Notes Benefit of Open Space in County

Dec. 11, 1998

More than 300 people came to Placer County's Open Space Forums in November to share their thoughts on why and how Placer's picturesque open spaces should be preserved for future generations.

While the county's General Plan already identifies the need to preserve open space, the Board of Supervisors have launched a major effort - now called Placer Legacy - to identify what kinds of open space should be preserved, how they can be preserved and what kinds of community support will be necessary to make additional preservation possible. As part of that effort, the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) held seven public workshops to better understand the views of the community. The Sierra Business Council, Placer County's non-profit partner in this project, helped to organize the workshops.

During those workshops residents rated "quality of life" issues as the most important reason to preserve open space. They cited such things as "physical and mental health", "silence", "rural character", "aesthetic qualities", "living in harmony with nature", and "providing a sense of freedom and security". Other key reasons for open space preservation included "wildlife protection", "protection of agriculture", "recreational uses", "economic development", "community identity", and "protection of watershed and natural systems."

Residents identified the consequences of failing to preserve open space as a "loss of quality of life" including "urban sprawl", and "pollution", "loss of beauty", and a loss of "quality of life for future generations", "personal space and community connection."

They also envisioned an "economic impact", translating to "jobs leaving the area", "loss of business diversity", "lowering property values", and "erosion of our economic base over the long term." A loss of habitat and natural systems, loss of agricultural productivity and a limitation on future options were other often-mentioned problems.

In answer to the question "what kinds of community support will be necessary?", residents stressed a need to keep people informed about open space preservation with good public participation in the planning process. They also said the community must be willing to help pay for open space, and stressed the need for agricultural assistance, political concensus building and respecting the property rights of landowners.

"Too often we lose things important to us because we assume it is somebody else's responsibility," said Supervisor Jim Williams. "This committee is charged with building a consensus throughout the county-cities included - that we will all have to share the costs and efforts of creating a legacy for ourselves and succeeding generations. Regulation alone will never achieve it."

During the next few months, the Citizens Advisory Committee and county staff will bring back information to the Board of Supervisors about tools which are available now to help protect open space, such as conservation easements, estate planning and grants; information about successes in other communities; and ideas which merit consideration for Placer County.

Advisory committee members plan to meet with major stakeholder groups, such as development and environmental interests, major employers, cities and special districts, utilities and large businesses. "The strength of the committee stems from the diversity of interests members represent," said Supervisor Rex Bloomfield, who helped nominate committee members, which were selected by the Board as a whole.

Board Chairman Bill Santucci stressed that community involvement is critical to the process. "Our CAC members welcome opportunities to speak in the community about Placer Legacy," he said. To arrange a speaker, contact Chairperson Joanne Neft, 916-663-9126.

A Placer Legacy newsletter will be published and mailed free to anyone interested beginning in January. Call the Placer County Planning Department at 530-889-7470 to be added to the mailing list.

A growing body of information about Placer Legacy is also available on-line on Placer County's web site, www.placer.ca.gov/planning.



CalWORKS Works in Placer County

Dec. 31, 1998

Placer County's successful Welfare to Work program (called CalWORKS), coupled with a robust local economy, is enabling more than 800 local families to begin the New Year as workers rather than as aid recipients without jobs, saving federal, state and local taxpayers millions of dollars.

Under CalWORKS, the number of people each month who initially sought just financial assistance and found jobs instead has climbed from an average of 40 people per month in 1994-95 to 125 per month. During the same time period, financial aid to individuals has dropped from almost \$20 million to less than \$10 million, as the number of active welfare cases decreased from more than 3,200 families to less than 2,000 families. The greatest improvement in job placement has come between 1996-97 and now.

"The whole community benefits as more people find jobs," declared Supervisor Bill Santucci, Board Chairman. "Our congratulations to the families who have made this important transition and our thanks to the employers who have made this program a success."

Placer County's success rate is sixth in the state, based on caseload reduction and the state's assessment of earnings by former clients.

Because most welfare money is Federal money passed through from the State and closely regulated by Federal guidelines, Placer County Supervisors don't get to spend much of the savings on other programs. There are incentives provided to counties which do well in reducing welfare rolls, but counties may be required to pick up more costs if the economy takes a negative turn. For that reason, Placer County is setting aside funds in reserve to help protect other programs should the county be forced to pick up future welfare costs.

"We can report these positive local statistics because of our success in implementing welfare reform with our community partners, and because of our strong economy," declared Bob Dunstan, Human Services Director for Placer County.

"However, we must also prepare for the inevitable time when the economy slows down, and must recognize that some families receiving aid face multiple barriers and will have a much more difficult time finding work."

Many of the people who found work through CalWORKS have been hired by temporary agencies. The jobs available have varied widely, and many require flexible hours. Nearly 65 percent of the clients live in South Placer County. Another 22 percent of the clients live in the Newcastle to Weimar corridor including Auburn. The rest live between Colfax and the summit, in Foresthill or in North Lake Tahoe.

Part of the challenge of helping clients find work has been making services more readily available. Placer County has opened one-stop centers to help people identify their work skills and obtain other support. The Roseville one-stop center is co-located with the state Employment Development Department (EDD), while other sites are located in Carnelian Bay and Auburn. In addition to strong support through EDD and the county, Placer County Office of Education is onsite linking clients to child care providers. Anyone needing a job may use EDD computers to discover job opportunities posted on the world wide web (called CALJOBS), and use the same computers to write resumes. Employers post job opportunities, and clients may forward them resumes via the internet.

Other kinds of support are available through the Golden Sierra Job Training Agency, the 49er Regional Occupational Program (ROP), local adult schools, Sierra College, Pride Industries and all chambers of commerce.

The Placer County Office of Economic Development recently received a grant from the State for \$56,000 to aid in job creation. Placer County's Economic Development Board which includes representatives from all six cities, the Placer County Manufacturers Association and other regional economic entities, has been named as the Jobs Creation Board by the Board of Supervisors.

County business development staff are located at the Twelve Bridges Regional Manufacturing Technology Training Center managed by Sierra College to assist businesses and to qualify employers for special hiring incentives. Employers can also receive on-site assistance from the county.